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ABSTRACT

The thematic approach to literature in which a single concept is developed through various works and genres has been greatly facilitated today by the convenience, ubiquity, and economy of the paperback book. By utilizing the paperback boom and by employing both small group and individual instruction, thematic units can be planned to meet the adolescent's felt needs and motivate him to broader reading experiences. For example, thematic units on (1) "the Alaskan frontier" offer excitement to the young reader through the works of such writers as Jack London, Margaret Bell, and Joseph P. Moody, (2) "conflict" allow the elements of conflict to be examined through such literature as "West Side Story," (3) "Loneliness" or "the search for identity" help teens solve their own personal identity crisis, (4) "protest," carrying through much of America's literature, can provide a unified approach to its study, and (5) "Around the World in 80 Days" can introduce a study of "foreign lands." (Suggestions for paperback books for each unit are included.) (JB)

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Contents

Paperbacks and Mount Parnassus
Margueritte J. Caldwell, Sunnyside HS, Tucson 1

The Elementary Teacher and Paperbacks
Sue Young, Eager Elementary School, Eager, Arizona 4

Paperbacks, the English Teacher, and the Librarian
Cynthia McCracken, Tempe HS 10

Science Fiction and the English Teacher
Noelle Derven, Prescott, Arizona 13

The Name of the Game is Read
Mildred M. Jeranko and Jane Tyo, Cortez HS, Glendale 18

Contemporary Drama in the English Class
William Siegfried, ASU Graduate Student 20

Paperbacks and the Thematic Unit
Jeanette Demicell and Nancy Cromer, Tempe HS 24

Paperbacks for the English Teacher
Floyd Jarvis, St. John's HS 29

Two Symposiums on Paperbacks 31

Current Reading 40

Shoptalk 42

Previews and Reviews 44

Addresses of Paperback Publishers 46

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PAPERBACKS AND THE THEMATIC UNIT

Jeanette Demicell and Nancy Cromer, Tempe HS

On a Monday morning, just before the first class of the week, an English teacher is about to close the classroom farther down the hall. The boy turns, pulls out of his shirt Dick Gregory's From the Back of the Bus, waves it at the teacher, and shouts, "I bought it man, I bought it. Bought four more while I was home. Didn't steal none." Bought or stolen, those five books were the first that boy had ever owned. (Daniel Fader, Hooked on Books, p. 59.)

The "textbook stigma" was not attached to his new, easily handled paperback books which he could conveniently stuff in his hip pocket. Interesting and colorful paperbacks have a more positive appeal than his old three-hundred-page, hard-back literature anthology.

The flood of attractive paperbacks, produced by hundreds of publishing companies and purchased by millions of adults, teenagers, and children, has made school more pleasant for both the student and his teacher. The ready availability of paperbacks has eased the task of the teacher who has tried to develop thematic units composed of various interesting literary works for teaching literature, but has been frustrated at the lack of materials available.

The thematic approach was first introduced in 1926 by Morrison's book PRACTICE OF TEACHING IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL. In devising a method of teaching to "combat the assign-study-recite trilogy", Morrison coupled Dewey's ideas with those of Herbart and the result was the teaching of literature thematically. (ENGLISH JOURNAL, March, 1967, p. 402). In the 1950's Morrison's thematic approach was revived and revised by Virginia Alwin and Richard Alm. In 1953, the ENGLISH JOURNAL sponsored a contest rewarding the three best suggestions for topics around which thematic units could be constructed. However, only in the past fifteen years has the teacher of English been able to painlessly use that approach to literature. The paperback book "BOOM" has been a "BOON" to the thematic approach to teaching literature: teachers are now able to inexpensively provide the multi-materials which are so appealing to young people and which are necessary for successful thematic unit teaching.

The thematic unit focuses on one concept or idea, and that concept or idea is the focal point for the study of the communication skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Multi-materials are used rather than one limiting anthology or textbook. Thus, during a thematic unit a student may engage in three levels of reading and/or activities: (1) in-common, (2) small group, and (3) individual. All are directed toward the treatment of the theme (concept or idea) inherent in the work.

"In-common" materials are those read and discussed together by the entire class. Also, during the unit students engage in small group activities involving four to seven students. These small groups may select or be assigned a selection to be studied by the group members. Perhaps the best feature of this approach is the opportunity for individualized instruction during the independent reading periods. To provide for the individual reading, a student, with guidance from the teacher, may select materials concerning certain aspects of the theme which interest him individually. This individual reading allows the student freedom of selection and allows the teacher time to work on a one-to-one basis with students. Through the variety in activity and through personal selection of available materials, the students become actively involved in the unit and realize that literature can be read and enjoyed.

Perhaps the key to successful thematic unit teaching is the selection of pertinent themes--themes that personally involve the students. The thematic unit purports to deal with a concept in depth; thus it is essential that teachers select materials which deal honestly with the theme rather than literature which must be stretched to "fit" the theme of the unit. The numerous adolescent novels in paperback (novels written about and for young people) offer the teacher a wide array of selection. It is the responsibility of the teacher to search out the materials--plays, novels, poetry, short stories, essays, and articles--dealing with the central theme of the unit and to make these materials available for classroom use. The paperback book has made this possible.

A thematic unit composed of paperback literature about Alaska and/or by Alaskan artists is effective for ninth grade students. Generally adolescents at this age level

are eager to read literature which is full of adventure and which deals with the unknown or the unexpected, as pointed out by George Norvell in his 12-year study on students' reading interests (READING INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE, Boston: Heath, 1950). By focusing the thematic unit on Alaska, the teacher has access to a wealth of literature in paperback form which is indeed of interest to the student. These two factors coupled with the various audio-visual material available through travel bureaus and film libraries set the stage for a successful experience.

Since the thematic unit deals with reading on three levels--in-common, small group, and individual--the teacher must have available a great many pieces of literature. The first selection read in-common is the short story by Jack London "To Build a Fire", which sets the mood for the unit by providing the feeling of the barren and deserted northland in the frozen winter months. Since it deals with the needed elements of excitement to interest students, success is guaranteed. This short story, along with various other short stories that can be used in this and in other thematic units, is available in THE GREAT ADVENTURE STORIES OF JACK LONDON (Bantam, 50¢). In the "Arctic" section of the collection are found three other short stories which can be used for small group or individual reading activities: "Love of Life", "The One Thousand Dozen", and "The League of the Old Men".

Poetry such as Robert W. Service's "The Cremation of Sam McGee" and "The Shooting of Dan McGrew" are also in tune with the Alaska theme. In THE BEST OF ROBERT SERVICE (Dodd, Mead, and Co.), students have access to not only the in-common poetry materials, but also to numerous other poems of adventure in the Yukon.

A long-time favorite of ninth graders, one that offers students the adventure and excitement of the unexplored northland, is Jack London's THE CALL OF THE WILD (Washington Square Press, 45¢). Included in addition to the novel itself are supplemental materials for the teacher such as the life and purposes of the author, the historical background, features of the author's style, and analysis of the book's characters. Other novels by London appropriate for reading during the Alaska unit are WHITE FANG and THE CALL OF THE WILD (Washington Square Press, 45¢) and THE SEA WOLF (Washington Square Press, 50¢). Adolescent novels which primarily attract young men are WINGS OVER ALASKA by Edward A. Herron (Washington Square Press, 50¢), the story of Carl Ben Eielson the famous pioneer hero of Alaskan aviation, and SECRET MISSION TO ALASKA by Roger Barlow (Tempo, 45¢), the story of Jerry's experience in Alaska and including his encounter with the Kodiak bear.

Margaret Bell's adolescent novels dealing with the Alaskan theme appeal to the girls: WATCH FOR A TALL WHITE SAIL (Tempo, 50¢), the adventures of a family at a lonely fishery in Nichols Bay; THE TOTEM CASTS A SHADOW, the story of a pioneer family and their neighbors the Haida Indians of Southwest Alaska; LOVE IS FOREVER, the story of a young couple who move to Alaska and have to adjust to a new and strange way of life; and RIDE OUT THE STORM, an account of a girl who is sent to a California finishing school and finds her Alaskan up-bringing to be a great hindrance in adjusting to the new life.

Additional non-paperback materials appropriate for the Alaska thematic unit are listed below:

Carrighar, Sally. WILD VOICE OF THE NORTH (Doubleday, 1959) Nonfiction
A naturalist, studying lemmings in northern Alaska, became deeply attached to a magnificent Eskimo dog, Bobo.

Freuchen, Dagmar, ed. PETER FREUCHEN'S ADVENTURES IN THE ARCTIC (Messner, 1960) Nonfiction
Here is a fine compilation of the famous Danish explorer's thrilling and

incredible battles with snow, ice, bears, wolves, hunger and danger. Also see PETER FREUCHEN'S BOOK OF THE ESKIMO (Dagmar Freuchen, ed., World, 1961, Nonfiction).

Machetanz, Sara. THE HOWL OF THE MALEMUTE: THE STORY OF AN ALASKA WINTER (Sloane, 1961) Nonfiction

This woman's account of her Alaskan winter--housekeeping in the Far North, social life with the Eskimos, filming the story of a sled dog from his birth to running with a team--is good reading!

Moody, Joseph P. and W. de Groot van Embden. ARCTIC DOCTOR (Dodd, 1955) P-Collier Biography

Dr. Moody traveled by aircraft, dog team, and canoe to visit his 2,000 Eskimo patients scattered over 600,000 square miles of the eastern Arctic.

Morenus, Richard. DEW LINE: DISTANT EARLY WARNING (Rand, 1957) Nonfiction

Morenus described here the building of the 3,000 mile DEW Line, vital link in the radar defense system along the Arctic shores of Alaska.

Rasmussen, Knud, compiler and translator. BEYOND THE HIGH HILLS: A BOOK OF ESKIMO POEMS (World, 1961)

"All human beings are poets in the Eskimo sense of the word." This is a beautiful collection of Eskimo poetry with magnificent photographs by Father Guy Mary-Rousseliere, an Oblate priest among the Eskimos.

Clarke, Tom E. NO FURS THE CZAR LOTHROP (1965) Novel

In primitive Alaska in 1805 Vassili Tamaroo found head-hunting, native hunger, and bitter cold--and a purpose for living.

Through reading good literature during the Alaska centered thematic unit, students enjoy the excitement, adventure, and uniqueness of the northern frontier and gain a more vivid picture of the often ignored, isolated portion of the United States.

A thematic unit prepared for use in the tenth grade focuses on "Conflict". During this unit various genre are read and discussed in terms of the inherent conflict. As a student progresses from one literary work to another, his understanding of the concept of conflict is broadened and deepened.

The play WEST SIDE STORY is read and discussed from the standpoint of family and racial conflict, and compared with the similar elements of conflict in the short story version of ROMEO AND JULIET in STORIES FROM SHAKESPEARE by Marchette Chute (NAL, 75¢). Both the plays WEST SIDE STORY and ROMEO AND JULIET are available from Dell for 50¢. The complete novel of WEST SIDE STORY by Irving Schulman (Simon and Schuster, Inc., 50¢) can be used as independent reading by a capable student.

Bella Rodman's adolescent novel LIONS IN THE WAY (Avon, 60¢) presents the racial conflict through the eyes of seven Negro teenagers who first attend an all-white high school in Tennessee. The play "Trouble on Sycamore Street" by Reginald Rose found in BEST TV PLAYS (Ballantine Books, 50¢) depicts the conflicts of an ex-convict who strives to secure a position in society after being released from prison.

The various literary works in the Conflict Unit are all readily accessible in inexpensive paperback books; otherwise the unit would be virtually impossible to present. The examples of literature mentioned are only a few of the books that could be used for a unit dealing with conflict. Since most stories are based upon some conflict, the problem is not in finding enough literature, but in choosing the best examples. At this point it is necessary for the individual teacher to isolate whatever elements

of conflict he wishes to explore and add literary works illustrating that conflict.

Other units using paperbacks:

A thematic unit on the theme "Who Am I?" is appropriate for ninth grade level as this age students are in a transition period trying to establish individual identities. The literature that is included depicts many different types of individuals in various situations as they struggle to know and understand themselves. Marjorie Smiley's collection WHO AM I? (Macmillan) can be used as the initial in-common reading. It contains not only short stories, but drama, poetry, and non-fiction as well. For instance, in "The Wise and the Weak", by Philip Aponte, the main character learned that it was better to avoid a situation than to try to be something he really wasn't.

The following list of literary works could be used for individual readings:

JAZZ COUNTRY, Nat Hentoff (Dell, 50¢)
LIGHT IN THE FOREST, Conrad Richter (Bantam, 50¢)
APRIL MORNING, Howard Fast (Bantam, 50¢)
ACROSS FIVE APRILS, Irene Hunt (Tempo, 50¢)
WHEN THE LEGENDS DIE, Hal Borland (Bantam, 60¢)
JAMIE, Jack Bennett (Bantam, 50¢)
SWIFTWATER, Paul Amnixter (Paperback Library, 50¢)
WATCH FOR A TALL WHITE SAIL, Margaret Bell (Tempo, 50¢)
MAGGIE, Vivian Breck (Tempo, 50¢)
A SEPARATE PEACE, John Knowles (Bantam, 75¢)
CATCHER IN THE RYE, J. D. Salinger (Bantam, 75¢)

Loneliness is a feeling that every person experiences at one time or another; thus, a unit centered on the theme of loneliness is universal in its appeal. Though this unit is designed for sophomores, the varied levels of literature should make it applicable to almost any grade level.

The following works could be used in the unit:

ROOSEVELT GRADY, Louisa R. Shotwell (Tempo, 50¢)
WATCH FOR A TALL WHITE SAIL, Margaret Bell (Tempo, 50¢)
THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER, Alan Sillitoe (NAL, 60¢)
MEMBER OF THE WEDDING, Carson McCullers (Bantam, 60¢)
OF HUMAN BONDAGE, Somerset W. Maugham (Pocketbook, 50¢)
CATCHER IN THE RYE, J. D. Salinger (Bantam, 75¢)

Instead of approaching American literature chronologically, the use of various themes of American literature give a more unified approach to the study. America was founded on "protest", and this theme has carried through the development of the American nation. Thus, "America in Protest" could form a lively literature unit for juniors. The following list is only a few of the titles that could be used.

WALDEN, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, Thoreau (NAL, 50¢)
TORTILLA FLAT, Steinbeck (Viking, $1.45)
THE SOUND AND THE FURY, Faulkner (Random, $1.45)
THE FIRE NEXT TIME, Baldwin (Dell, 50¢)
MAIN STREET, Lewis (NAL, 95¢)
ARROWSMITH, Lewis (NAL, 95¢)
BABBIT, Lewis (NAL, 95¢)
TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD, Lee (Popular Library, 60¢)
THE UGLY AMERICAN, Burdick and Lederer (Fawcett, 60¢)
FAMOUS AMERICAN PLAYS OF THE 1930's, Clurman (Dell, 75¢)

For seniors a thematic unit of world literature in paperback might be developed around the theme of "Around the World in Eighty Days". If possible, the film of Jules Verne's story should be used as an introduction to and motivation for the varied literature in the individual reading list. If the film is not available, Verne's book of the same title might serve as in-common reading.

THE PEARL (Mexico), John Steinbeck (Bantam, 50¢)
GREAT EXPECTATIONS (England), Charles Dickens (Many editions)
LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER (England), Alan Sillitoe (NAL, 60¢)
THE GOOD EARTH (China), Pearl Buck (Pocketbooks, 50¢)
BORN FREE (Africa), Joy Adamson (Bantam, 75¢)
CRY THE BELOVED COUNTRY (Africa), Alan Paton (Scribner, $1.65)
ANNA, THE KING OF SIAM (S. E. Asia), Margaret Landon (Pocketbooks, 50¢)
EXODUS (Israel), Leon Uris (Bantam, 95¢)